



The Center of our City Center

Posted by [Pierluigi Oliverio](#) on Monday, April 26, 2010

Last week I attended evening budget meetings in Districts 3 and 5. The center of our city (District 3) had a high turnout from residents who find great value in community centers. Particularly, the Gardner and Washington Community Centers. Both facilities provide a place to go and where residents can be positively impacted. Classmates and friends of mine from Willow Glen High grew up in the Gardner area, formerly known as "Barrio Horseshoe." It was a problematic neighborhood with many gang issues.

My friends in Gardner managed to stay out of the gangs because their parents would physically discipline them if they hung out with people involved in gangs, and kept them busy with chores and work. David Pandori and Cindy Chavez both worked hard to make improvements in the Gardner neighborhood and should be complimented for turning that neighborhood around with the help of passionate residents like Rudy Martinez. Also, praise to my colleague Sam Liccardo for continuing the Pandori/Chavez legacy in Gardner.

The other facility is the Washington Youth Center located in the neighborhood around Washington Elementary and Sacred Heart church. This is another area that has been dealing with gangs for decades. The Redevelopment Agency funded the construction of the Washington Youth Center and the adjacent library along with physical improvements to Washington Elementary. However the general fund is responsible for the day-to-day expenses. Many came to tell their stories of what these facilities meant to them. Some stories brought people to tears as they had family tragedies but also success stories of their children.

Some attendees came from other cities to advocate for our Therapeutic Services program that enables kids in wheelchairs to participate in sports like basketball. They come from other cities like Cupertino and Monterey since surrounding cities stopped offering these services.

There were those who asked, "Why did we ignore the structural deficit all these years?"

Many expressed their opinion that public safety unions should accept wage cuts to save city services and binding arbitration was unfair. Pastor Sonny Lara asked, "Why are people so generous with money for tragedies in other countries but we do not donate to our own local community?" My favorite quote of the night: "We need to stop electing politicians that promise us everything!"

If there was one theme in the District 3 budget meeting it was to keep community centers open. It was stressed by many that community centers and libraries save lives in certain neighborhoods and that these facilities act differently than in Almaden, Cambrian, Evergreen, Rose Garden and Willow Glen. Many felt that community centers and libraries should be open more hours in neighborhoods that have higher needs, which could be determined by crime rate, poverty rate, etc..

I was asked afterwards by several young people who were good role models if would I support their specific community centers over others. I said, "The easy answer is to tell you yes and then walk out the door and vote no." However, I continued, "the idea of, should some neighborhoods get more services then other neighborhoods is worth debate." I then asked the youth if they cared who cleans City Hall or would prefer that their community center stay open. They chose the community center.

I believe we should maximize cost savings in areas of our city that do not directly touch residents before cutting services that impact residents. Otherwise we are saying, "Sorry young people, the status quo on cleaning city hall is sacred and better then providing you services that would directly impact your future." If you do not like this trade off of cleaning staff versus community center employee, then how about community center employee versus librarian or community center employee versus a police officer? Take your pick. Side note: Laying off new police officers is a double loss since we lose the investment/cost to recruit, test, background, academy, field train the new officer.

But let's get back to the debate on providing more services to certain neighborhoods and less to other neighborhoods. I would acknowledge that higher needs exist in certain neighborhoods and that prevention is less costly than the worst-case scenario of incarceration. There is a disconnect between costs and responsibilities of the city and final costs that may end up on the County or State, but there is also limited

sharing of revenue to achieve these goals. On the other hand, I do not believe every person in a certain neighborhood or zip code is affluent.

Within each neighborhood perceived to be upper-middle income, there are those who rent, have a mortgage they are struggling to pay, long-term unemployed, a single mom with kids, seniors on a fixed income, disabled veterans, etc. I assume these residents and specifically youth would want to have the opportunity to read a book or partake in an activity at a community center.

In addition these perceived upper-middle income neighborhoods pay higher property taxes and may feel that they should at least have equal neighborhood services. Personally, I think each neighborhood should get equal infrastructure like sewers, streets, sidewalks and streetlights. Equity in parks is more difficult because of the build-out of nearly all open space and the cost to procure it at today's prices. (Such a tragedy that we lost out on approximately \$90 million in park fees from exempting affordable housing from this fee.) When it comes to what amount of neighborhood services for each zip code, I am open for debate and would like to hear your views.

Is it fair to provide more service to specific neighborhoods? Is that Marxist? "Each according to his abilities to each according to his needs. Should government be neutral and provide exactly the same to all areas?

When people buy a more expensive home does that mean something? People choose to buy or rent in areas based on surrounding amenities and pay a price determined by other property owners and renters. Do we let that be the barometer?

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